

Dear Councillor

SPECIAL COUNCIL

Councillors are summoned to a Special Meeting of Council to be held at **7.30pm on Thursday, 2 November 2023** in the **Council Chamber, Civic Centre**.

Yours Sincerely



Andrew Bramidge
Chief Executive

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillors' declarations of interest (if any) in relation to any items on the agenda.

3. Harlow Council Electoral Cycles (Pages 2 - 46)

4. Matters of Urgent Business

Such other business which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be received as a matter of urgency by reason of special circumstances to be specified in the minutes.

Harlow Council Electoral Cycles



Report to:	Special Council
Date:	2 November 2023
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor James Leppard, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance
Lead Officer:	Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services (01279) 446099
Contributing Officer:	Alison Hodgson, Electoral Services Manager (01279) 446038

Recommended that:

- A** The Council notes the results of the public consultation on whether to change the council's electoral cycle.
- B** The Council hereby adopts a scheme of whole council elections, meaning an electoral cycle of one election every four years with all councillors being elected, in accordance with section 34 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- C** The first ordinary elections under the whole-council elections scheme will take place on the day for ordinary elections on 2 May 2024 and every fourth year thereafter.
- D** The Returning Officer be given delegated authority to take such steps to enable those elections to be held including those resources required by this resolution.

Background

1. On 20 July 2023, the Council passed the following motion:

““Harlow is undergoing once in a generation change, but the Council cannot be complacent. It must do everything it can to ensure that the change Harlow is experiencing reaches its full potential. By moving to all-out elections, the Council will be able to:

- Focus better on its long-term, strategic goals, allowing Harlow to become the best place to live, work and raise a family;

Save upwards of £90,000 each year; and

- Better avoid voter fatigue.

This Council, therefore, resolves to:

- i) Undertake a public consultation with the public, at the earliest opportunity, on the question of moving to all-out elections;
- ii) Following the consultation and mindful of the responses, request that the relevant Portfolio Holder report back to Full Council so it can vote on moving to all-out elections, or continuing with the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds; and
- iii) If the Council resolves to change its electoral cycles, to take all necessary steps to change the cycle as from the All-Out elections in May 2024.

That the public consultation shall run from 24 July 2023 until 18 September 2023....”

2. This report brings forward the results of that consultation and the options available to the Council.

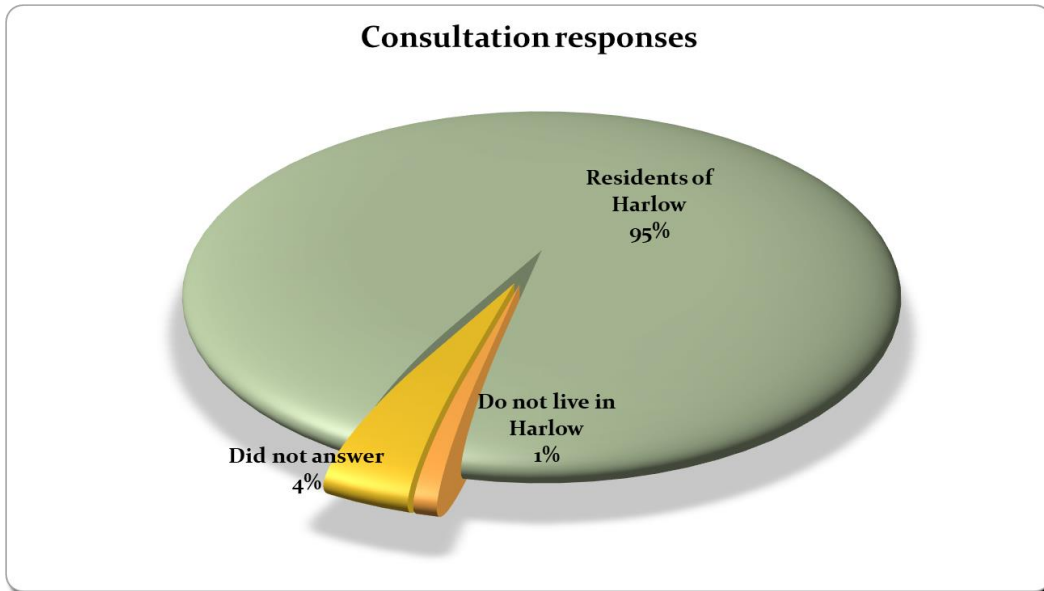
Issues/Proposals

3. Currently the Council holds its elections in thirds. Each year, one Councillor for each of the 11 wards is elected. On the fourth year, the Council does not hold elections. Essex County Council holds its elections in this year.
4. Most UK councils currently hold all-out elections with many of the remaining councils holding them by thirds (Met and not met districts - 142 (71%) all-out elections, 51 (25%) by thirds, 7 (3.5%) by halves)
5. The Council has the power to switch from holding elections by thirds to all-out elections by resolution under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This can be achieved regardless of the current Government Order made and approved by Parliament in July 2023 following the review undertaken by the LGBCE (Local Government Boundary Commission for England). If such a change were approved, this could take effect from the all-out elections being held on 2 May 2024
6. Prior to passing any resolution to convert the electoral cycle to whole council Elections, the Council must have taken reasonable steps to consult with such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed changes.

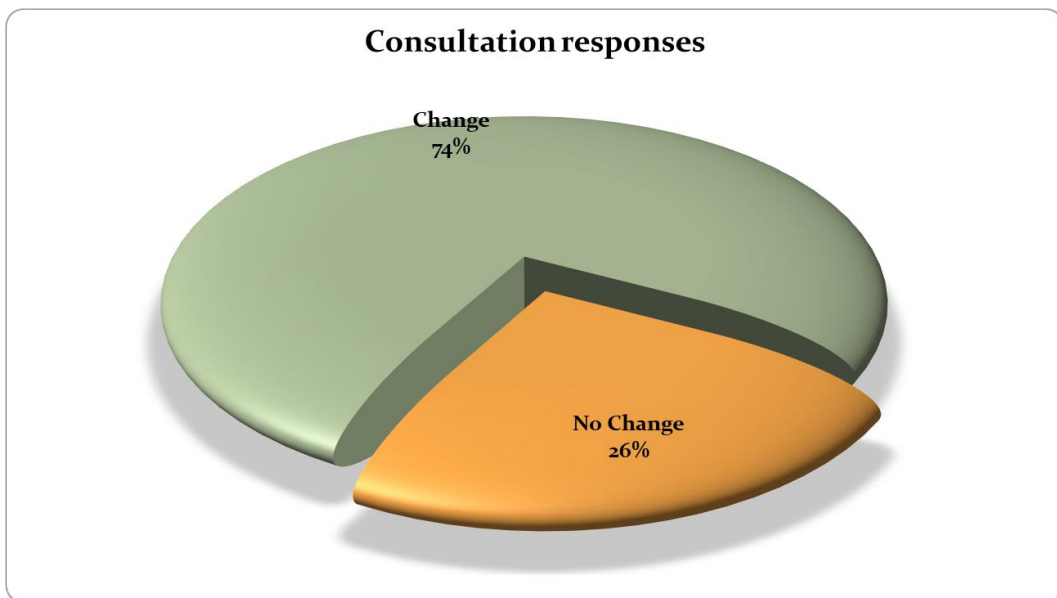
Results of the Consultation

7. Officers have undertaken a consultation, carried out between 24 July and 18 September 2023, and results are presented here.
8. The consultation was published on the Council’s website and publicised on our social media. An email was also sent to all current polling places and other interested organisations. The responses are attached as Appendix A.

9. The Council has received a total of 491 responses - 444 online and 47 paper responses. These can be seen in Appendix A. These responses have been assessed to ensure that they are unique, accurate and valid. This is the highest ever response on a consultation on electoral matters.
10. Of these, 467 stated that they live in Harlow, 5 do not live in Harlow and 19 did not answer this question.



11. 74% (364) want to change to whole council elections and 26% (127) want to keep elections by thirds.



12. A summary of the responses given by residents and a copy of all written responses is set out at Appendix A to this report.
13. The Council last reviewed electoral cycle in December 2021 ([link to previous report](#)), prior to the first stage of the LGBCE review and at that time the report of

the Electoral Working Group summarised the advantages and disadvantages of the different types of cycles which were also set out in the Consultation Paper (see Appendix B attached).

Next Steps

14. The Council is invited to consider the information above and decide whether it would like to change the election cycle for Harlow. For the change to be approved, the 2007 Act requires that a two-thirds majority of those voting at the Full Council meeting support the change.
15. If the Council resolves to move to whole Council elections, then it must approve the date by which this change should be effective. Because the Boundary Commission requires the Council to hold a whole council election in 2024 in any event, this is proposed as the date at which the Council's resolution to change could be implemented. Legal advice, referenced in the implications below, advises that this is possible separately from the order of the LGBCE specifying the continuation of the by thirds method.
16. Following adoption of any resolution to move to whole council elections, to make the change legally effective, the Council is required to publish the details in a "scheme" (e.g., on its website) and give notice to the Local Government Boundary Commission of this change.
17. Should the change be agreed, the Returning Officer will be required to deliver the elections scheme approved and adjust forward financial projections in future budgets.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

There are no specific equality implications identified for either electoral cycle option. Elections must be delivered in such a way as to ensure the needs of people with protected characteristics are considered and appropriately accommodated. No changes are proposed to the method of delivery. Changes to delivery and locations has been undertaken (see report on Polling Station review)

Climate Change

No specific climate change implications have been identified but elections on a less frequent basis will use less resources and mean less journeys to polling stations. The legislative framework across elections means that traditional methods of delivery are still the default position, i.e., in person voting using paper-based methods.

Finance

Cost of Elections

The Council currently budgets £85,000 for a standalone district election. There are some fixed costs for elections such as polling venue hire, which mean that combined elections (e.g. PFCC) are comparatively cheaper as costs can be shared. The cost of the all-out election in 2024 is around £110,000. Sufficient budget is available for that election as costs will be shared with PFCC and potentially one other election. The Council can claim back costs associated with non-district council elections. For example, Essex County Council elections.

Current Electoral Cycle Option:

Under the current electoral cycle, the Council reduces its budgets on non-district council election years in the event there are by-elections. There is a short term deficit in the three year window due to rising costs of services offset by only ECC elections in 2025.

All Out Option:

If the Council switched to all-out elections, there would be some years where there would be no ordinary elections at all. The Council would therefore only need to budget for by-elections, which are clearly much cheaper to run due to their limited scale. Under all-out elections the likelihood of by-elections is greater. It is estimated that over a ten-year period the switching to all-out elections would save the Council approximately £399,000 when comparing the current system with all out elections adjusted for inflation. This assumes inflation at around 5% pa and that General Elections will be held in five-year intervals.

A summary position is shown below:

	MTFP period				10 yr Totals
	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28 to 33/34	
	£	£	£	£	£
Current budget*	85,000	85,000	85,000	595,000	850,000
Costs					
current electoral cycle**	110,000	0	98,400	589,200	797,600
all out elections from 2024**	110,000	34,000	34,000	273,000	451,000
Savings					
current electoral cycle	-25,000	85,000	-13,400	5,800	52,400
all out elections from 2024	-25,000	51,000	51,000	322,000	399,000
* no inflation applied					
** assumes 5% inflation pa					

Note: The all-out Elections proposal would require an annual contribution (as outlined in the table) into an earmarked reserve which would be called upon to fund yearly by elections and four yearly elections.

In the event of a by-election being called under either option, a budget of £15,000 would be required for each one called. Increases in costs mean there is currently no headroom in the elections budget.

Potential sharing savings would apply to both options depending on the year in question.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Communities and Environment

Appropriate bodies have been consulted over access needs. Further interim assessment of polling places because of the LGBCE review are considered at the meeting earlier in the evening and will be required to be reviewed further after May 2024 by statute. The open consultation has given opportunity for all community sectors to comment either electronically or by completion of a form.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Chief Executive

Governance and Corporate Services

Under the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, councils that elect by thirds can move to whole-council elections by passing a resolution at a special meeting of the Full Council.

The resolution will only be deemed carried if there are two-thirds majority of those voting, vote in favour of a proposed change to the electoral cycle. Should that majority not be reached at the meeting there is no requirement for a contrary motion.

If the Council resolves to change its scheme, it will be unable to change the scheme again for at least five years.

If it declines the proposal the next practical implementation opportunity will be 2028 for it to achieve maximum financial benefit from choosing a year where it can be combined with other elections. The Council cannot choose to hold its elections in a County Council year (2025) by law.

There are statutory arrangements which must be met once the Council resolution is passed including a requirement to publicise the fact that a resolution has been passed and produce an explanatory document; and to notify the Local Government Boundary Commission for England of the resolution.

Additionally, I have taken further advice on the matter of differences between the order placed before parliament by the LGBCE (which continues the current by-thirds cycle from 2026 onwards) and the all-out election proposals. Advice is that the Council can, at this juncture, make such a decision legally should it so wish. Discussions have been held with LGBCE Officers throughout the process.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services

Appendices

Appendix A – Responses to the consultation
Appendix B – Consultation Paper

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

LGBCE – Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Summary of comments made during consultation.

1. The main comments from the consultation from those who want to change include:
 - a) Saves Money - Present system is a waste of money.
 - b) Need to be more efficient and stop wasting money.
 - c) Funds can then be diverted to improve 'services' for residents.
 - d) Stabilise the administration. Gives leaders longer term to make proper decisions.
 - e) Allow for greater continuity, stability, and better future planning.
 - f) 4 years gives the Council more time to implement its plans without the distraction of constant elections.
 - g) It makes sense to have continuity and having the time to put into place proposed changes.
 - h) Allow longer term plans to have a greater chance of success.
 - i) Councillors could focus on delivering long term benefits to Harlow, rather than short term political photo opportunities with the current setup.
 - j) Losing up to two months each year due to purdah hampers the smooth running of council business.
 - k) Makes more sense so it is more like General elections. Many people are fed up voting every year.

2. A snapshot of the main comments from those who want to keep elections by thirds include:
 - a) The current system of 'thirds' allows a reasonable balance between stability and democracy. It allows continuity each voting year. Electing by thirds members remain who have experience in council work and retains knowledge. It is important to retain experience in any one year rather than the possibility of having all new and inexperienced councillors every four years/prefer the idea of gradual transition rather than the all at once approach.
 - b) A regular is democratically healthy. Circumstances can change and potential councillors can be chosen for their skill set's depending on what is happening in the town.
 - c) It avoids the possibility of a hung council for four years with little decision-making taking place (having an odd number of Councillors avoids this).
 - d) The present system has worked satisfactorily for a number of years.
 - e) Four years is too long between elections. Give the voters in Harlow the chance to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction on a more regular basis.
 - f) More frequent elections generally mean higher activity levels, and areas with all outs may lapse into lengthy periods of inactivity as the

next election is far away. Voting in thirds ensures that Council decisions are kept under scrutiny by electorate.

- g) Current councillors can carry on the work seamlessly. Whole council elections mean councillors in place who do not know what is in the pipeline leads to delays and misunderstandings instead of getting on with the job in hand.
- h) Better system - more representative, more punishing to those who overly paper residents, more responsive to trends and requires standing politicians to strive to keep pledges and refresh pledges per re-election opportunity.
- i) Voting for one councillor at an election is simpler and understood by voters.
- j) The system works so why change. Cost to the Council is miniscule to the overall budget. Cost reduction if by-election needed as can time with next local election. We should pride ourselves in Harlow for our balanced and well thought out election timetable. The advantages of which are worth far more than any supposed savings in administration costs of holding an election.
- k) Elections in thirds should ensure the council better represents the views of the electorate rather than a narrow snapshot which may skew the vote over a short-term issue - which may be National not local

All Comments Received

Comments received on all-out election consultation	
Change	It would be cheaper for the council
Change	Save money!
Keep	There is a need to ensure that independent views stop the continuous bickering between the Labour and Conservative parties and long term residents views are not falling on deaf ears. Regular elections help to keep the democratic process alive with wider representation.
Change	SAVE MONEY EACH YEAR
Change	Too many elections.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	Allows councillors to be held to account more frequently, not allowed to remain in post for long if failing.
Keep	It avoids the possibility of a hung council for four years with little decision making taking place. It also allows for some continuity of membership
Change	Need to be more efficient and stop wasting money
Keep	Simpler and more regular voting
Keep	Council may not live up to expectations.
Keep	Voters can give either a vote of confidence or no confidence each year depending on the effectiveness of the councillors.
Keep	A regular is democratically healthy. Circumstances can change and potential councillors can be chosen for their skill set's depending on what is happening in the town. Gives people a chance to change the council if the administration is ineffective, 4 years is a long time to go with a council that has/is failing
Change	It is cheaper for Harlow people
Keep	If a councillor hasn't made a difference or connected with their constituents within his or her 1st year, then they may struggle if the term is changed to 4yrs. Residents have the right to expect their councillor to work for them & if the connection or trust isn't there then the whole system fails.
Change	cheaper, logical, simpler
Change	Cost. Higher participation rates.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Save taxpayer money.
Change	Makes sense to save money spent needlessly on so many elections
Keep	<p>The right of every adult citizen to have some say in decisions that affect their lives, by voting for decision makers at both local and national level, was achieved by centuries of struggle and sacrifice by ordinary people who demanded that right. It is sad that many do not choose to exercise their right, especially in local elections. But reducing the frequency of elections will tend to foster even more apathy ("We only see you once a year"; "We only see you once in four years.") While casting a free, secret, vote is the essential practical act in and the culmination of the democratic process, its significance depends on year-round political activity - debates, meetings, campaigns, petitions, resolutions, formulating policies and demands, etc, etc. With four years between opportunities to actually affect decisions, there will be even less incentive to engage in these activities.</p> <p>I suspect that the turnout for this consultation will be even less than for the normal local election. I hope I am wrong, but if I am not, I hope the Council will not make its decision on a very small number of responses, but will give serious consideration to the fundamental principles that I have briefly mentioned here.</p>
Keep	The fewer opportunities for electors to vote, the less democratic the system. Electors must be able to express their opinion of the council every year through the ballot box. If this is opportunity is removed, then the claim of the council to represent the will of the people is diminished.
Keep	Current councillors can carry on the work seamlessly Whole council elections mean councillors in place who do not know what is in the pipeline leads to delays and misunderstandings instead of getting on with the job in hand
Keep	Been working for years. No reason to change as it involves residents on a regular basis
Keep	Residents right to vote should not be reduced
Keep	4 years is to long look at cllr lemay

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	I think it focuses the council and councillors minds on those who they represent. In light of some authorities filing for bankruptcy, I think this is a important check on performance that adds to accountability
Keep	This method keeps the public more engaged with the political process.
Change	Too many expensive elections. Most don't bother voting.
Change	Allow for greater continuity, stability and better future planning. Reduce costs and allow our elected representatives to focus on the job.
Keep	The current system is absolutely fine. There is no need to change it and add confusion. Please leave the system the way it is.
Keep	There needs to be a clear route to voting out under performing councils/councillors every year rather than having what amounts to dictatorship. Democracy is best served by having regular yearly council elections with a right to remove councillors of any party that fail to attend a minimum of 50% of council meetings Furthermore no local councillor should be allowed to be a county councillor at the same time.
Keep	There is more chance of someone with no affiliation to a major political party getting elected. I strongly believe that party politics should be minimised in local government.
Change	The opposition should be made to resign.
Keep	I believe it is important to retain experience in any one year rather than the possibility of having all new and inexperienced councillors every four years
Change	I have only be asked by one local councillor who I would vote for. Never met the other members who are trying to save their seats. So for me once every 4 years makes sense.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Neither: elections by halves would be better with far better local consultation via press and local magazines and community associations
Change	The current system does not allow for any real whole system change or for any plan to be fully implemented - or not. Yearly elections actually deplete the real delivery cycle to approx 6 months - 3 months induction/bedding in and the last 3 months preparing for the next election. Neither effective or efficient use of time or money.
Keep	4 years is a long time to wait if you don't agree with the current council
Change	Save money
Change	More efficient and cheaper
Change	4 years gives the Council more time to implement its plans without the distraction of constant elections. It also saves money. Better all round.
Change	Saves a lot of taxpayer money
Change	The cost of these elections can be used on other things that Harlow needs.
Change	We do not need to have so many elections and it is too expensive.
Change	Will mean fewer politicians knocking on the door and fewer silly leaflets.
Change	Save ££££s

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Get rid of the Conservatives!
Change	Costs too much tax money.
Change	Lot cheaper for the town
Change	Don't understand why we need so many elections. I would prefer to have fewer.
Keep	More accountability to the electorate.
Change	Better to save money. We don't need so many elections as low turnout figures show.
Change	We need to save money. This is a waste with no benefits.
Keep	<p>To encourage residents to continue to engage with local issues and matters of concern. To hold ward cllrs to account . Every area is being challenged by huge changes . Voting in thirds ensures that Council decisions are kept under scrutiny by electorate.</p> <p>The Council as a whole needs to really address the issue of voter engagement . This doesnt mean more info on social media - it means thinking creatively about how and where to engage directly with people . That is - if you are actually interested in doing so.</p> <p>Harlow is under huge pressure - lack of funding from central govt and ECC and virtually nothing is left of public services . We have all witnessed the way Harlow County Cllrs who are elected for 4 years simply refuse to be held to account . Not a good advertismnt for change in local council elections . Our town is falling apart - the whole infrastructure is crumbling. No 'social service' is functioning. People have lost hope . We need engagement if local democracy is to survive .</p>

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Save money
Change	More economical and less elections
Change	Cheaper
Change	Better to save money
Change	Stop wasting money. Better uses surely
Change	Complete waste of money!
Change	Don't need the cost of these elections. Ridiculous!
Change	Present system costs too much
Change	Better for administration and money
Change	Makes sense to not have so much money for elections
Change	Less cost for the town

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Stop wasting money that be used for better things.
Change	To save money and time
Change	I don't want so many elections. Why do we have so many?
Change	Too much money is spent on elections.
Change	Why not?
Change	Too many elections and to much wasting money.
Change	Less costs to taxpayers must be good
Change	Better for residents because it saves money.
Change	It just seems odd to hold council elections every year as I have lived in other Essex areas (Romford/Ilford) and they don't do this, plus if it will save money to go towards improving services surely that would be a good thing with more focus on improving the town.
Change	Won't have Tories for 4 years!
Change	Makes sense to reduce costs

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	More economical. We don't need as many elections
Change	Fewer elections will save money
Change	Need to reduce costs
Change	Saves money
Change	Lot more economic
Change	Currently wastes money
Change	Better use of taxpayer funds. We elect county councillors every 4 years, should be the same for local elections. It is currently too confusing for people
Change	Saves wasting money
Change	Makes sense and is much cheaper
Change	There seems limited opportunity for a majority council to implement programmes beyond the time-frame of 1 year in office, when the composition and majority of the council may change on an annual basis. Councils need 2-3 years or more to plan, implement and execute capital projects and bring progress to Harlow.
Change	I back moving to a four-year cycle for local elections in Harlow because it will save taxpayers' money (an estimated saving of 100,000 a year) and allows an administration, of any political colour, a full term to implement their manifesto commitments.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

	<p>Moving to a four-year cycle for elections is not unusual. Essex County Council adopts that cycle and so do almost 70 per cent of other English councils.</p> <p>It makes sense to implement a new election cycle that continues to hold local politicians to account, but also allows for the better administration of the town.</p>
Change	Save money
Change	It will save money and give the elected a proper mandate for a 4 year term
Change	<p>Saves having to keep voting every year</p> <p>Gives councillors 4 years to put in their plans</p>
Change	a much simpler, cheaper, economic, and fairer system
Change	Saving money
Change	Funds can then be diverted to improve 'services' for residents.
Change	The money these elections cost could be better spent on services
Change	For the reasons stated. Yearly elections just don't make any real sense. 4 years in position gives each councilor the time to make their mark, and perhaps the chance to improve one or two things in the process. Of course the Additional £300,000 could be spent more effectively too.
Keep	Saving money

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Too save money on my council tax.
Change	Wasting money and your time we pay for!
Change	Sick of governing bodies wasting money that is not theirs to waste
Change	To save money
Change	Saves money
Change	Wasteful with funds
Change	Effective use of taxpayers money and better services
Change	Thinking what could be done with the money you save.
Change	save us money. could be better spent
Change	so they could be accountable much earlier if needed..
Change	Change the system, save residents some resources and spend that money for the betterment of the people of Harlow

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Saving money
Change	I always thought it was strange and hard to understand why we seemed to have loads of local elections. The fact it will also save money has to be as positive.
Change	To save money
Change	It makes more sense
Change	Its sound common sence
Change	Money and time being put to work on improving services is great. Hope that this is supported by Robert Halfon.
Change	Have more money to spend on the town.
Change	The current system seems a waste of time and money
Change	Cost
Change	Save money and time
Change	Financial

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	An all out-in election will create a high stakes, high pressure environment where year 4 of the cycle will become dominated by electioneering, point scoring and complaining. The current system keeps continuity.
Change	IT IS ONLY RIGHT THAT THE PEOPLE OF HARLOW HAVE THE CHOICE TO CHANGE THE COUNCIL IF IT WISHES.
Change	Saving money and rationalisation, electing the council by thirds is irrational
Change	Expense and clarity
Change	I agree with your reasoning
Change	Cost effective
Change	So that (my) money will be better spent.
Change	Save Money.
Change	Savings
Change	Stop wasting tax payer's money.
Change	To fall in line with everyone else.The reasons for elections by thirds is not explained.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Better administration and less waste
Change	Wasting too much cash at present
Change	To save money
Change	Save money
Change	Stabilize the administration, save money and minimize the electoral politics
Change	To save money and time
Change	It makes sense to have continuity and having the time to put into place propped changes.
Change	If it is going to save £300,000.00, then why not?
Change	Not enough time to make a real change & keep to who ever gets in to their promises if elected. But would also like to see where the extra money is spent they would be saving
Change	To keep elections by thirds wastes too much time. Time better spent on honouring the mandates councillors were elected to deliver. Also, to potentially make changes every year does not give enough time for those elected to carry out their work. Not rocket science, is it !
Change	Cost saving and more production from the Council (or hopefully some at least!).

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Hopefully you can get things done better
Change	Far better every four years so the council can focus on doing what it is supposed to be doing and not fighting elections!
Change	To save money and make it easier
Change	To save nearly £300,000 and six months of political campaigning.
Change	Saves money and gives greater stability
Change	Let the council leaders have more time to put future plans in place
Change	To save the people of Harlow money and give those in charge time to see new ideas through
Change	£100,000 per year is money better spent on ensuring better, improved services for Harlow residents.
Change	I think the Council should be given the time to see through any changes/new ideas and Incentives for the people of Harlow without being voted out again before their changes have come to fruition
Change	Save money
Change	Spend money elsewhere

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	To save money and wasted effort of staff resources
Change	saving money
Change	Financial and to allow longer term plans to have a greater chance of success.
Change	To save money for hardworking council tax payers
Change	Would rather the time and money be better spent
Change	Reduce the cost to the tax payer
Change	This is a cheaper option!
Change	It is too costly and time consuming.
Change	To save money
Change	Wasting money to do this too often
Change	Waste of money to elect councils by thirds every year.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Save money and less talk
Change	Cost saving.
Change	Save money
Change	Save time and money
Change	Give new council chance to make changes
Change	Enable the current leadership to do the work that needs to be done in Harlow
Change	Would make for more stability, and save money
Change	Gives the council longer to put plans into action
Change	Save loads of money and I think they can spend our money better then on elections
Change	It will save up to £100,000 a year of public money
Change	Better use of taxpayer funds

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Waste of money holding elections every year. 4 year elections are much better.
Change	Less wasting time on costly elections.
Change	Saves money
Change	Makes sense and saves money.
Change	We have too many elections and it is expensive.
Change	Proposed changes save money.
Keep	More democratic Less confusing Better continuity than a complete change innne go
Keep	Less confusing for electors More democratic to have more frequent chances to hold politicians to account
Keep	Fairer
Change	It will save taxpayers money
Keep	Failed promises to cut Council Tax. Our Council Tax now higher than that of people living in wealthy areas in houses worth twice or 3 times as much as ours. At the sane time as paying more Council Tax, our services have been cut in schools and fire protection. Bus routes have been cut too, and police crime clear up rates are very low in

Comments received on all-out election consultation

	<p>spite of paying an extra police precept. Potholes in roads and pavements are dangerous to car and van drivers and cyclists and to pedestrians. They also cause costly repairs and hospital treatment. Bins are emptied less often.</p> <p>We would not want to wait 4 years to vote out Councillors who break election promises and who give us poor services.</p>
Change	<p>Would save money, both for the council and local parties. Hopefully a better turn-out. More time to govern and less time canvassing etc. Gives the majority party a mandate for 4 yrs to carry out their local strategy.</p>
Change	<p>Councillors could focus on delivering long term benefits to Harlow, rather than short term political photo opportunities with the current setup. Reduce costs of elections to once every four years.</p>
Change	<p>Better for council</p>
Change	<p>makes economic sense</p>
Change	<p>Gives the elected council a chance to present a manifesto & see it through over 4 years!</p>
Keep	<p>Senior officers get too close to councillors, need to break the cycle, to achieve proper representation for all residents.</p>
Change	<p>It would be cheaper and allow for the winners to plan long term</p>
Change	<p>This will make for more effective governance and administration, allowing for longer-term policies.</p>
Change	<p>Cheaper for residents.</p>

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	The term would be too long especially if not successful we wouldn't be able to vote a new party in.
Change	Save money
Change	Better for the town
Change	This will save money for other needed services.
Keep	Keep council responsive to residents' concerns through frequent elections
Change	Better for Harlow. Too many elections. We need stability.
Change	Less confusion
Change	It is more efficient and less expensive
Change	There are too many elections
Change	More economical
Keep	Agree with the current system

Comments received on all-out election consultation	
Change	The councillors have more time to put their policies into practice
Change	Keep having elections cost money which could help budgets . Also you will need to form new working relationshipd
Change	The council would have more stability
Change	Better administration and less costs
Change	Longevity and uninterrupted cycles for consistent policy work
Change	Once every 4 years is similar to General elections and allows more time for policies. Plus it saves money
Keep	I feel its more democratic as it holds the incumbent party more open to acvount on a more frequent basis
Keep	<p>I am NOT in favour of moving to a four yearly voting system and would wish to keep the current election process of ONE THIRD of Councillors being elected yearly.</p> <p>Harlow Council operates a Cabinet system that is there more for the benefit of Councillors and the management than to engender the local electorate participation.</p> <p>The current system is not well attended by the electorate who form my area think it to remote. Questions holding those to account must be written two days in advance, the electorate is then limited to one supplementary follow up question with no further debate by either the electorate or indeed Councillors who there are to represent the electorate.</p> <p>The sterile environment in which the Cabinet operates does more to inhibit, indeed estop any meaningful debate on questions raised due to limitations placed on questionnaire and Councillors nor does it enable the electorate to hold the Council Officers and elected members to account.</p> <p>Moving, the electoral process to every four years would in my view further isolate the electorate from the elected Councillors.</p>

Comments received on all-out election consultation	
Keep	More democratic
Change	Save money
Keep	Our elected representatives are more accountable. It is more democratic. There is less drift since the councillors receive more frequent feedback from the electorate.
Keep	3rds keeps your mind on the position
Keep	It makes the Council more accountable
Keep	ACCOUNTABILITY
Keep	It has seemed to me over many years that having local elections annually keeps elected members somewhat "on their toes". They are more likely to involve themselves with issues that will benefit their wards and the town as a whole, and to communicate with the electorate. Even with the present system, we do have a proportion who, once elected, drop their constituents and concentrate on whatever internal power struggles are going on. I would not like to wait four years to withdraw my support from a ward councillor who has, for example, consistently avoided following up inquiries or problems, or reneged on a policy pledge.
Keep	I think it makes the council more accountable to the electorate. It ensures that elected councillors have to be always available to their electors.
Keep	The present system gives the public the opportunity to register their disapproval with whichever party is in control. If policies are put into effect with which they disagree, great changes can be put into effect without voters being able to try to change things by voting for different Councillors who share their opposition to what is happening. Four years is too long a time for people not to be able to try to change things.
Keep	Holding elections only every 4 years means that residents cannot hold the administration to account until 4 years. I don't think so....

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	More democratic and accountable
Keep	Keep to as it is.
Keep	Four years is too long between elections.
Keep	Elections in thirds should ensure the council better represents the views of the electorate rather than a narrow snapshot which may skew the vote over a short term issue - which may be National not local
Keep	Having an election every year makes the council more accountable.
Keep	The current system of elections by thirds allows for a certain amount of continuity and, for various reasons, is more democratic.
Keep	It makes the council more accountable and gives voters a chance for change if not happy
Keep	Having 4 years no election means people on power will do nothing for the next 4 years and if they win again thats nothing achieved in 8 years. Total scam.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Whilst it is true to say that Harlow is in the minority of local authorities (one of only 49, soon to be 48 District Councils by 2024) who host elections whereby Councillors are elected for a 4 year term by thirds (at each election a third of the council is elected) and elections are held each year except the County Council year - this does not mean that we are wrong to do so. Instead, I have outlined several compelling reasons as to why we presently enjoy the ideal election timetable and why we should resist changing to whole council elections (once every four years).

Our town's current system fosters moderate changes to the political direction and leadership of the Council, rather than radical knee jerks or 'take-overs'. For instance, if we adopted whole council elections - we'd risk seeing more instances where previous wedge issues such as Brexit, Immigration, tackling so-called illegal encampments or dubious election pledges to cut Council Tax would distort election campaigns because the stakes would be unreasonably high. Political parties could radically alter the composition of the chamber within one election cycle, with voters being denied recourse for four years! Extreme right-wing parties such as Reform UK (formally UKIP) could run populist campaigns that, if successful, would jeopardise the harmony we currently enjoy amongst our multicultural communities here in Harlow.

Furthermore, the present system preserves a form of 'Committee Memory' which can aid newly elected Cllrs in grasping their new responsibilities. This support structure for new Councillors would also be compromised by the fact that whole council elections would make the entire process of 'on-boarding' new Councillors more time consuming and costly to our Local Authority. Retaining elections by thirds (our present system) also prevents an effective 'wrecking ball' election in which a large-scale sea changes to the composition of the Council would leave unfinished/undelivered projects open to political tampering or rollbacks.

Finally, whilst the Council's constitution does allow Cllrs to be dismissed for various infractions (such as non-attendance to meetings), and the Local Government Act provides further safeguards - there is currently no mechanism for re-call petitions or by-elections that would allow voters to signal their discontent. This is also arguably a limitation of our current system, however, at least the current timetable of elections by thirds forces the presiding administration to face the electorate and account for its current performance. By this measure, elections by thirds allow voters to signal their (dis)content on a regular basis - a form of accountability that would be weakened if we were to change to whole council elections.

In response to arguments about cost-saving, we should pride ourselves in Harlow for our balanced and well thought out election timetable. The advantages of which are worth far more than any supposed savings in administration costs of holding an election.

Keep

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	If its not broken why fix it.
Keep	More accountabilitie to the council and councillors
Keep	This gives the constituents the real opportunity to democratically have their say on the council and who leads the council as a whole.
Keep	Annual Council election maintain ongoing accountability
Keep	Changing it would suit the Tories, who are basically failing the town. If a council is failing this town, then we should be able to shift the balance using the existing system, whoever the ruling party is, and yes, that might be a failing Labour or Lib Dem majority as well.
Keep	It gives a much better stability to the Council and makes sitting members more accountable
Keep	Keeps the sitting administration more accountable by us voters. If we do not like the way they are running Harlow we do not have to wait for several years to change it.
Keep	It allows a constant rotation of councillors rather than the same ones staying in place for too long and also gives a more representative voice to residents who have the opportunity to change their vote rather than be stuck with their choice for four years.
Keep	Reflects the changing mood of the electorate
Keep	The council is more accountable. If the council is not keeping electoral pledges or moving in the wrong direction , fresh candidates can be elected to challenge the incumbent.
Keep	Accountability

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	It would give residents more of a say, more frequently
Keep	Because if you have something that isnt working you are stuck with it for four years
Keep	Votes often reflect satisfaction or more likely dissatisfaction with the national government hence the outcome of any election is likely to be heavily biased by the current national financial situation, scandals, more scandals, Liz Truss, etc. This is bad enough under 'election by thirds' but at least any incompetent persons hopefully may be diluted by the rest.
Change	There are too many elections. It is confusing. Once every 4 years is better.
Change	Makes sense economically
Keep	I prefer the idea of gradual transition rather than the all at once approach
Keep	If it's not broke don't fix it
Keep	Better to not have power over the electorate for four years. The system works so why change. Cost to the Council is miniscule to the overall budget. Most councils have the third every up for election.
Keep	The system as it is works! No one has given any good reason as to why you should change it. Why not advertise the reasons why?
Keep	A fairer system
Keep	The ability to remove poor performing councillors Does not allow for changes in local policy decisions or opposition if a change of direction sensible

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	more continuity, less elections
Keep	The current system appears more appropriate
Keep	I believe it gives the public more control.
Keep	More frequent opportunities to make your views known with more immediate political accountability. Greater continuity of councillors as they can't all be replaced in a single election. Gradual change that retains knowledge and experience whilst allowing for new councillors with new ideas. Voting for one councillor at an election is simpler and understood by voters.
Change	This would avoid the need for a purdah period each year, which slows down Council business.
Keep	This stops councils working in minimum term cycles and allows continuity for services.
Keep	Fours years suffering under the Tory yoke would grind this town into the dust. The only way things get done around the town is when the elections are approaching and the incumbent party tries to sway voters by actually doing things that residents have been asking for. If this was extended to every four years, the incumbent council would do little to nothing for 3.5 of them.
Change	To give chance for things to happen and implemented plans to show the results
Keep	More frequently able to determine makeup of council. More continuity as cannot change entire council in one go. More regular opportunity to express electoral and democratic opinion of council.
Keep	Greater accountability

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	<p>It might encourage Councilours to think about local issues, about the people they are supposed to represent.</p> <p>A four-year cycle leaves Councilours getting old and stale, set in their ways, caring more about "the old boys club" the party they belong to than the town itself. You can see excellent examples of this in the House of Commons.</p> <p>A four-year cycle also leaves the door open to any party on the fringes, whether far right or far left to take control or even the Greens.</p> <p>Then Harlow will be stuck with a council that No One wants for four years.</p>
Change	continuity
Keep	It is more democratic. I want the opportunity to vote in thirds in order to be able to vote council out if they are under performing.
Change	Elections by thirds means that the politicians are in perpetual campaign mode, which is not good for the administration of the town. Elections by thirds also involves significant costs. So, going for whole council elections every four years will save money and provide political stability to the council.
Change	I want a more stable council with less useless elections. Having elections every year is a complete waste of money.
Change	I think that there beeds to be more focus on getting things done for the town than silly politics for two months every single year
Keep	Better system - more representative, more punishing to those who overly paper residents, more responsive to trends and requires standing politicians to strive to keep pledges and refresh pledges per re-election opportunity.
Keep	By electing by thirds members remain who have experience in council work. A complete change could mean any new councillors appointed would need to start without any of this experience.. Maybe thoughts should include risk of "staleness", or rigidity, in those who could become councillors for many years without a break? Conversely perhaps councillors should consider an age for actually "resigning from a post held for over a certain number of years"? The voters may become too accustomed to certain ,or specific, ways, in which some decisions are made. A Council that seems more permanent and entrenched in routine, or older methods of serving the population as times change will almost certainly be biased in some way, - particularly with regard to the parliamentary aspect of the time and their own allegiance.. By changing the whole Council at once it may cause the "baby to be slung out with the bathwater"!

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Too much money wasted at the moment. Prefer money spent on better services.
Change	Too many elections mean few people bother to vote. Better to have them more like General elections as more people vote.
Change	We waste too much £ on yearly elections.
Keep	It encourages greater accountability and give the voters in Harlow the chance to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction on a more regular basis. Having an election every four years dilutes that accountability.
Change	It wastes less money.
Change	It will give stability for four years.
Change	Better to have a stable council. It is crazy and unstable voting every year.
Change	Fewer elections are better. We have too many at present. It is confusing.
Change	Saves taxpayer money
Change	it is far better to do have election every 4 years. that will give councilors 4 year to learn what they have to do and get on with the work. cost effective. it will stop the election fatigue.
Change	Potentially provide the opportunity to allow the elected council spend the majority of its elected term to make Harlow a better place to work and live in.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Elections are too frequent and confusing.
Change	Will be a more efficient system. Plans will be able to be implemented and seen to completion more easily.
Change	Much better to have 4 year elections so as to give the Council time to implement its policies. The system of thirds increases uncertainty. Savings also make this more attractive.
Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Losing up to two months each year due to purdah hampers the smooth running of council business. 2. Saving around £95,000 for each of three years out of every four makes financial sense. 3. Each administration has time to develop their plans, especially on large infrastructure projects, without it being derailed by annual elections. 4. As someone who has involved themselves in local election campaigns, I can attest to how time consuming and exhaustin they are when they occur each year. Time would be better spent in administering the town.
Change	Read that the savings could be enough to help services offered by the council. Who knows maybe council tax won't be so high.
Change	Every 4 years is preferable. Yearly elections are too confusing.
Change	I think it should be more like General Elections every 4 years. Don't understand why we need elections every year.
Change	Too much time and money wasted on the current system. People will pay more attention if it is every 4 years.
Change	Greater stability giving the administration a full term to deliver there manifesto
Keep	<p>Because of the cyclical nature each counsellor still has a complete term.</p> <p>The main control of the council can change each year, which gives the voters more power and is needed to prevent councils from avoiding responsibility if the electoral feel they are not being represented well.</p>

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Cost
Keep	One year in every four is lost to elections. No it isn't and this is very misleading. The work of almost all council officers carries on throughout the election period. Councillors need to be held accountable on a regular basis, nit left for years carrying on just as they or their Party wants.
Keep	For stability sake
Change	This would save money.
Keep	The current system of 'thirds' allows a reasonable balance between stability and democracy. It allows a level of continuity each voting year. If the whole council is changed it will lead to more chaos, more disruption, more uncertainty.
Change	I think councillors will be better placed to plan for four years of work. And at present waste 2/3 months per year canvassing This will be better spent on making the town better for all
Change	Togive greater stability in implementation the msndate you were elected on
Keep	Politicians must be answerable to the people, elections by thirds ensures that should a party currently in charge of the council become unaligned with the needs of Harlow residents they can make there dissatisfaction known to the council by reducing or eliminating the parties overall control. It could be argued that 4 years enables the council to focus on its vision, but honestly in 20 years of living in the town I have yet to see the council (of any party) express a clear and concise vision. Politicians, economic and leaders of the parties and councils change and for that reason we must always keep the threat of losing their seat in the forefront of councillors minds (it is after all, all they care about)
Keep	More democratic Means that councillors are more accountable More frequent elections generally means higher activity levels, and areas with all outs may lapse into lengthy periods of inactivity as the next election is far away.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Keep	<p>Councillors are more accountable to public - can change make up of council more swiftly than waiting 4 years.</p> <p>Focus on local issues rather than national election issues.</p> <p>No sudden change of entire council with no experience.</p> <p>Cost reduction if by-election needed as can time with next local election (there have been many by elections in past year)</p>
Change	Saving on yearly elections and
Keep	Better continuity
Keep	Benefits of engagement of the public
Change	Cost saving and longer term thinking
Change	To give more time for things to be put in place
Keep	To save money and inject more into local needs.
Keep	To avoid councillors to become complacent in their position as representatives of Harlow residents.
Change	Easier for residents and will give councillors more time to deal with issues and be held accountable.
Keep	four years is too long
Change	Cost and time to get things done

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Cost and more time to sort out things
Keep	I would like to have more regular engagement with my councillors
Change	It gives the council more stability in carrying out its policies
Change	Less expensive and gives both Administration and Opposition the opportunity to plan strategically, tackling the tricky issues and the quick wins.
Keep	If it isn't broken don't try to mend it. The present system has worked satisfactorily for a number of years.
Keep	The present system gives the chance to boot out a Cllr who is not doing their job or representing their constituents sooner and does not give any Party free rein to do what they like for four years.
Change	Saves money
Change	So they are given time to implement new policy and strategies
Keep	It gives the electorate a better option regarding voting for or against an administration
Change	Better to have fewer costly elections. The system is confusing.
Change	Saves money and is more efficient for Harlow.

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Makes more sense so it is more like General elections. Many people are fed up voting every year.
Change	Makes sense to have fewer elections and to save money. People are fed up with voting every year.
Change	Cheaper and far better meaning. Also allows change to actually happen
Change	Having elections by thirds is confusing and unnecessary. We elect national governments for 4-5 years. The same should apply to local elections.
Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It saves money 2. It is more efficient and makes for longer-term strategies and policies 3. Most councils operate this way. 4. It reduces uncertainty and the risk of constant changing of administrations
Change	Won't have Tories in for 4 years!
Change	Elections every year are a waste of money
Change	Present system is a waste of money
Change	Save money for other services
Change	Too expensive
Change	Wasting money

Comments received on all-out election consultation

Change	Costs too much.
Change	It will save money.
Change	Money.
Change	Giving the leaders longer term to make proper decisions. With longer term civilians are more familiar with the party leaders
Change	Makes more sense.
Change	I think it is too much money.



Council Consultation on Election Cycle

We would like to hear your views on whether we should change to whole council elections every four years, or whether we should keep the current system of ‘elections by thirds’.

We are carrying out a consultation which runs until **18 September 2023**.

We have included some background information below, along with the main arguments for both electoral cycles.

Our council

Harlow Council has 33 Councillors who represent 11 wards. Every ward has three councillors, who are elected for four years.

Current cycle – elections by thirds

The Council holds elections for one seat in every ward for three successive years out of four.

Whole council elections

Under this system, all councillors would be elected at the same time, once every four years.

This would not affect other elections such as parliamentary, county council and police, fire and crime commissioner elections.

How to have your say

You can complete the online survey at www.harlow.gov.uk/consultations or complete the form overleaf.

Outcome of consultation

The Council has the power to change its election cycles under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

Following the consultation a meeting of the Full Council will consider whether to change the electoral cycle or to keep it as it is.

If the election cycle were changed this would happen from May 2024.

Why keep elections by thirds	Why change to whole council elections
<p>More frequent opportunities to make your views known with more immediate political accountability.</p> <p>Greater continuity of Councillors as they can't all be replaced in a single election.</p> <p>Gradual change that retains knowledge and experience whilst allowing for new councillors with new ideas.</p> <p>Voting for one councillor at an election is simpler and understood by voters.</p>	<p>Four year mandates and less focus on yearly campaigning.</p> <p>Lower cost as elections won't take place every year.</p> <p>Allows for a complete change in councillors once every four years and we can have single or multi-member wards.</p> <p>Fewer elections may reduce election fatigue which may increase turnout.</p>

Have your say

<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep elections by thirds	<input type="checkbox"/>	Change to whole council elections
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What are your reasons for your choice above? (optional)

Do you live in Harlow? Yes No

Full Name (Optional)

Postcode (Optional)

Completed forms can be handed in at the Civic Centre or The Latton Bush Centre.

Privacy Statement

The information on this form will only be used for the council consultation on the election cycle.

We will look after personal information securely and we will follow the Data Protection legislation. We will not give personal information about you or any personal information you may provide on other people to anyone else or another organisation unless we have to by law.

The lawful basis to collect the information in this form is that it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest and exercise of official authority. Harlow District Council is the Data Controller. You should refer to the Privacy Notice at www.harlow.gov.uk/privacy for further information relating to the processing of personal data.